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Information for the Public

Dealing with anthrax and other threats with biological agents

What to do:

Stay CALM and THINK.

- **AVOID unnecessary CONTACT with the suspected substance or object.**
- **PREVENT further SPREAD, by keeping the substance covered.**
- **LEAVE affected areas, and CLOSE OFF or BLOCK them OFF.**
- **WASH hands with soap and water.**
- **ALERT SUPERIORS or POLICE.**
- **DO NOT ALLOW ANYONE TO LEAVE the premises of the occurrence.**

Background:

Institutions in Europe and overseas have received threatening letters in the past. Most were empty envelopes; some contained powder-like substances. It is also possible that such incidents can occur in Switzerland. The aim of this report is to provide recommendations for ways to deal with such incidents.

Don't Panic:

- The anthrax pathogen, the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*, or more specifically its spores, can give rise to infections of the skin, digestive tract, or lungs.
- To produce an infection, the organism must be rubbed into the affected skin or wound, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine dust. Even after contact with the pathogen, the disease can be treated early with the appropriate antibiotics. Anthrax cannot be transmitted from person-to-person.

Dealing with suspicious letters or packages with threats (for example, "anthrax"):

- Do not shake or empty the contents of a suspected container;
- Place the suspected container in a plastic bag or another sealable container to prevent the contents from escaping;
- If an appropriate container is not available, cover the suspected container with a cloth, a waste paper basket, rag, etc.;
- Leave the room, keeping doors and windows closed, and keep out third parties;
- Wash hands with soap and water to avoid contacting the skin with powder;

- What to do next:
 - If at home: contact the nearest police station;
 - If at work: contact the nearest police station and superiors; and if necessary, notify security;
- Make a list of all people present at the discovery of the suspicious container and provide the list to the police.

Dealing with a spilled powder of unknown or suspicious origin:

- Do not try to clean off powder / dust;
- Cover the powder with a cloth towel, waste paper basket, rag, etc.;
- Do not remove the covering;
- Leave the room, keeping doors and windows closed, and keep out third parties;
- Wash hands with soap and water to avoid contacting the face with powder;
- What to do next:
 - If at home: contact the nearest police station;
 - If at work: contact the nearest police station and superiors; and if appropriate, notify security;
 - Remove dusty clothing carefully and place in a plastic bag or other sealable container; turn this over to the police;
- Make a list of all people present, especially those who came into contact with the powder, and provide this list to the police.

If a room is contaminated by an aerosol:

(For example: A small distributor mechanism is triggered. There is a warning that the air conditioning system is contaminated and that an agent has been released into an open space.)

- Turn off local ventilators and air conditioners;
- Immediately leave the area in question;
- Leave the room, keeping doors and windows closed, and do not allow anyone else to enter;
- What to do next:
 - If at home: immediately call the police at 117;
 - If at work: immediately call the police at 117 and inform superiors; if appropriate, notify security;
- Turn off air conditioners in the building, if possible;
- Make a list of all people present and provide this list to the police.